

Joint Capital Planning Committee – Minutes 3/4/11

Meeting convened at 10:00 AM in the Town Room of Amherst Town Hall

Present:

Rob Spence

Doug Slaughter

Kay Moran

Jim Wald

Sarah McKee

Diana Stein

Emily Lewis

Sonia Aldrich – Comptroller

Amy Lane – DPW

Jerry Champagne – Schools Information Services Director

Chris Pacunas – Town Information Services

Sandy Pooler – Finance Director

John Musante – Town Manager

Richard Rosner – Planning Board and liaison to the Transportation and Bicycle Committee (arr. 11:00)

Amherst School District Information Services

(Doug Slaughter recused himself from this discussion as he works for this department)

Mr. Champagne presented the five year capital plan for the Amherst Schools Information Services. He noted that it can be frustrating using last year's plan as a basis for this year's plan due to the fact that technology progresses so rapidly. Looking back to FY 2010-11, many replacements and procurements were deferred due to the tight budgets. These now need to get back on track. For FY 2012, a priority is updating telecommunication services. Mr. Champagne sees this as a safety issue. Our current system is an older VOIP system put in three years ago during renovations. There are quotes from vendors to replace this with a newer system. All schools would now be interconnected with this new system. Currently, many classrooms at Wildwood School and Fort River School have one telephone for two classrooms, due to the original open classroom design. Also, the public address/intercom systems at these schools are forty years old. \$22,000 would go to adding telephones, \$22,000 would go to replacing the PA/intercom system at each school (\$44,000 total for that). The current school budget has some unspent funds that would go to this project, and the Regional School District would contribute to their portion of the project. This request is for the remaining necessary funds.

Mr. Musante asked what the total estimated project cost is?

Mr. Champagne said that quotes are coming in, but that they are often refined downward. \$167,000 is the lowest quote at this time, but they are all refining downward currently.

Mr. Musante asked if it would be possible to “piggy-back” this new infrastructure with the VOIP systems for the town? Would there be any cost savings there?

Mr. Champagne replied that that is being looked into, but that sharing that infrastructure would likely only be for redundancy for safety.

Ms. McKee asked the time frame for the price. Mr Champagne replied 3-4 weeks, it depends on the vendors.

Ms. Moran asked if there would be a better estimate in two weeks. Mr. Champagne hopes so, but it depends on the vendors.

Moving on to schools technology infrastructure, Mr. Champagne noted that computer replacements had already been deferred for one year, and that the year before that, there had also been no replacements, because none had been scheduled for that year. He noted that we are reusing the computers from Marks Meadow, and that this decreases the number needed to be replaced. There are no printer replacements for this year. Most of our computer monitors are approximately ten year old CRT monitors, and some are starting to fail. The plan is to start phasing in LCD monitor replacements over five years. Teachers would like data projectors in each classroom. Smart white boards are also requested and would be phased in according to teacher preferences. Projector bulbs cost in the neighborhood of \$300 a piece. This inventory is now centralized with I.S. Hard drive replacements are needed. Our current Storage Area Network (SAN) is a high speed storage device (i.e. servers) and it is consolidated at the Middle School. This is a nine year-old system, and requires replacement.

Mr. Musante asked what would be the total project cost for the SAN replacement?

Mr. Champagne replied \$85,000 (for Amherst and the Regional Schools)

New wireless network equipment is also requested. Our current wifi equipment cannot handle the load of wireless devices. We would also expand access to other areas, for instance the elementary school gymnasiums. In the area of multimedia equipment the replacement of older equipment has been cut back. Some new equipment, such as new document cameras, are requested.

Mr. Musante asked for relative prioritization of the requests.

Mr. Champagne stated the telecommunications would be the top priority, but he also noted that we have deferred computer and monitor replacements for two years.

Ms. Moran asked if these replacements would then be the second priority?

Mr. Champagne replied, yes, but all of the requests are a priority; and that we need to bring the schools technology into the 21st century.

Department of Public Works

Ms. Lane presented the FY 2012 DPW requests. There are requests for sidewalk improvements, improvements to the DPW facility, including adding a women's shower (there is not currently one), and adding cubicle space. Also requested: Chapter 90 money for road repair, updating the transportation Master Plan, and a security system for the DPW facility, including new ID card readers at satellite facilities. For parks, a new ground groomer is requested for \$12,000, as well as a five foot scag mower. The parks department has a lot of old equipment. A ¾ ton pick-up truck with plow is requested for routine vehicle replacement. Funds are requested to improve drainage at the end of Cottage Street. A new pavement line painter is requested. Currently, this task is contracted out.

Ms. Moran noted that there is \$10,000 available for DPW facility improvements in the water and sewer fund, as well.

Mr. Musante noted that it is the town's belief that, over time, street line painting by the town will be cheaper than contracting this out.

Ms. Moran asked if we might be able to rent this out, with operators, to neighboring towns as a way to raise revenue.

Mr. Musante agreed that we could look into that.

Ms. Lane noted that they are proceeding with street light relamping at an annual amount.

Mr. Slaughter asked if street drainage counted as sewer maintenance and could pertain to the sewer fund.

Ms. Lane replied, "maybe."

Ms. Moran noted that eventually the town will be required to manage its storm water runoff, probably with an enterprise fund.

Ms. Moran asked for relative prioritization.

Ms. Lane said that the top priorities would be the groomer (spreadsheet line 14), the mower (line 18), and the Transportation Master Plan (line 4).

Ms. Moran, looking ahead to FY 2013 asked, what is a snow melter?

Ms. Lane explained it is a large box to melt piled snow banks. The town is losing some snow-dumping areas due to the projects at the old landfill.

Mr. Pooler asked if it was legal to melt snowbanks directly into a storm drain. We are not sure.

Town Information Services

Mr. Lacunas began by noting that many of last year's capital projects have been very successful, and he thanked JCPC for its work. He also thanked JCPC for recognizing the value of investment in technology infrastructures. He noted the importance of technology assisting the increase of self services going forward. These services reduce costs, due to less staff used for resident inquiries. Residents can now view their water bills and usage on-line.

Mr. Pacunas then went over five items on the capital request spreadsheet.

First, Infrastructure Replacements. Most of these are basic, and most are important. These include servers, switches, routers, etc. We have been emphasizing the consolidation and standardization of our I.S. Infrastructure. We have gone from eighty printers town-wide, to twenty multifunction printers.

Ms. McKee asked how we do our data back-ups.

Mr. Pacunas stated that there are two types. The first is for severe catastrophe only. It is off site and harder to access directly. The second is a live back-up system

The second item is telephone system upgrades and replacements. The town has a five year old VOIP system. Mr. Pacunas feels that we have saved \$100,000's with this system. There are critical needs to replace some of the older infrastructure.

The third request is for document and records imaging and scanning. We have recently done a two year large-scale records scanning project. This is a good time to move our scanning project forward.

Mr. Pacunas noted that this item is his only "number 2" priority. All of the other items are considered "number 1" priorities. This project will help us move into the paperless world.

Mr. Musante asked what are the near-term priorities for the scanning project.

Mr. Lacunas responded: finance & clerks, annual reports, and police. Currently we have "too much paper."

The fourth request item is a new copier for Town Hall. Town Hall has not had a high-volume copier for 5-6 years. The old copier would be re-used in a different department. The town was not funded for any copiers last year. This machine would also scan, fax, and print. It is multifunction.

The fifth item request is the library infrastructure list. These are kept as a separate item only to show that the library does continue to receive I.S. capital monies (otherwise, these would be the same as the

town I.S. upgrades).

Ms. Moran and Mr. Musante noted that historically in the JCPC report, these expenses are shown as “library” capital expenses; however, it is actually presented by the town I.S. Department.

Mr. Pacunas noted that the town Website has been a huge success. Town Information Services are moving toward a green direction. We are decreasing trips to town hall, moving to more paperless records, and using online job applications. Many new systems draw directly from the town database. For example, meetings can be planned online, and once approved, this information goes to the electronic signs, email lists, and text message lists with “one-click.”

Town-wide Transportation Master Plan

Mr. Rosner spoke about the Transportation Master Plan. This plan would help implement to goals of the recently completed Amherst Master Plan. It is important not to close options for future transportation as we implement the Master Plan. Possibilities include: dedicated bus lanes, a rubber-wheeled trolley route. The funding request would be for \$50,000 for a consultant to develop the Transportation Master Plan.

Mr. Spence asked why this is a top priority, with so many competing capital needs.

Mr. Musante responded that the Transportation Master Plan will help us invest more intelligently in the future, and will work with our draft “Complete Streets” policy.

Mr. Rosner noted that the longer that we delay, the harder it will be to accommodate mass transportation.

Ms. Moran noted that Umass is working on a plan that may include the closing of a portion of North Pleasant Street. We may need to work with Umass concerning this plan.

Ms. Moran noted that next week's meeting will be the final presentation, from School and Town Facilities. She noted that if state funding comes in better than initially expected, then the BCG will need to hear from the JCPC about where to possibly use these funds.

Mr. Musante said that the current worksheets use 6.25% of the total tax levy for Capital expenses. In order to maintain this level of funding, we would need to use the improved projections for state money for Capital expenses.

Finally, Finance Director, Sandy Pooler distributed copies of his 3/1/11 memo to the Select Board and Finance Committee describing the Town's successful sale of \$5 million in 10-year bonds: \$4.5 million for road repairs and \$500,000 for purchase of the Hawthorne property. The Town will pay interest of 2.2%, a low and very favorable rate. Attached to the memo is Standard & Poors' report giving the Town a AA/stable bond rating and praising the Town's financial management. The report noted that Amherst currently has a very low level of debt, which Mr. Pooler said leaves some room for taking on more debt in the future.

The meeting adjourned at 11:40 AM.

Respectfully submitted by Rob Spence.